

The Civil War - 1644

Parliamentarian Commander Major General Rowland Laugharne

A Pembrokeshire man from St Brides and professional soldier, Laugharne had made his name fighting the Spanish in the Netherlands before returning to command Parliament's forces in West Wales from their base at Pembroke.

He would drive the Royalists twice from West Wales with his regional forces before changing sides in 1648 and being defeated by his former comrades Oliver Cromwell and the New Model Army. He narrowly escaped execution for treason after drawing lots.



Royalist Commander Lieutenant General Sir Charles Gerard

A professional soldier from England and a veteran of the fighting in the Netherlands against the Spanish. In May 1644 he was appointed the King's Lieutenant General in Wales after the defeat of previous leaders.

A brilliant and aggressive soldier he initially restored Royalist fortunes but his harsh wartime demands on the local population alienated them from the Royalist cause. He was repeatedly called away to support the collapsing Royalist war effort in England. After the war he commanded Charles II's Lifeguard.



Lord Protector Commander-in-chief Oliver Cromwell

Cromwell was born into the landed gentry to a family descended from the sister of Henry VIII's minister Thomas Cromwell. Little is known of the first 40 years of his life, as only four of his personal letters survive, along with a summary of a speech that he delivered in 1628.

He became an Independent Puritan after undergoing a religious conversion in the 1630s, taking a generally tolerant view towards the many Protestant sects of the time; an intensely religious man, Cromwell fervently believed in God guiding him to victory.



The Siege Of Laugharne Was Where Some Of The Bitterest Fighting Of The Civil War In Wales Took Place

Laugharne in 1644 had been at war for two years. Several Royalist regiments had been raised drawing recruits from the area and one (Sir Henry Vaughan's) spent the war with the King's main army based at Oxford. Initially controlled by the Royalists like the rest of Carmarthenshire (and almost all of Wales) the town had come under Parliament's control in spring of 1644 before being regained by the Royalists that summer. Both times without fighting. Life had been hard for the population with increasing demands for supplies and financial 'contributions'.

The position of the residents of Island House may have been particularly challenging during Royalist occupation as they were noted Parliamentarian supporters. Charles Gerard as the new area commander realised the strategic significance of the Laugharne. Although Carmarthen was the main town it's long perimeter and ruinous walls meant he didn't have the troops to defend it.

Laugharne commanded any approach from the West and the Parliamentarian stronghold at Pembroke and couldn't be safely bypassed. It's garrison could strike at the communications and supplies of an army advancing on Carmarthen so it had to be captured first.

It was smaller and easier to defend with intact town walls and a strong and now refortified castle. Gerard basically decided to seek to protect Carmarthen by focusing attention on Laugharne.

The port was also vital as a potential landing place for desperately needed Royalist veterans from Ireland. Not trusting amateur local commanders Gerard placed Lieutenant Colonel Russell in command. They had served together since the start of the war with Russell as second in command of Gerard's own cavalry regiment.

Time Line Of A Siege - October / November 1644

OCTOBER 26TH	Parliamentary commander Rowland Laugharne arrives from St Clears and spent the next few days bringing up his army and artillery which needed great effort as it was so heavy.
OCTOBER 28TH	In a show of force 2000 Parliamentary troops are deployed around the town with artillery batteries emplaced ready to fire.
OCTOBER 29TH	Demand to surrender issued to Colonel Russell and his 200 strong garrison with 4 pieces of artillery. Despite being outnumbered 10-1 and hugely outgunned Russell refuses. Parliamentary artillery opens fire pounding the town from the hills around (see image to the right). A storming party of 200 picked musketeers mostly from Colonel Beale's London Regiment and armed with the latest small arms storms the town but fails to take the gate at Mariners Square.
OCTOBER 30TH	The Mariners Gate falls and a piece of artillery is moved into the gateway pointed directly at the Castle Gate and it's defensive ravelin earthwork in front a mere 100 yards away. The Castle gate is pounded by artillery from 3 directions and directly to its front. The triangular shaped ravelin of hard packed earth deflects much shot up and over the castle falling in the area of the harbour and Island House or ricocheting directly down Wogan Street towards it. Several attempts to rush the Castle gate and burn it down or blow it in fail.
NOVEMBER 2ND	10pm another storming party captures the Castle Gate House and drives the defenders back to the Inner Ward of Perrot's Mansion. The artillery is now concentrating its fire on this from multiple directions with Island House immediately adjacent to it. Fighting continues throughout the night.
NOVEMBER 3RD	Colonel Russell and his garrison surrender and after their courageous resistance are allowed to march away with honour.



Artillery or cannons in the Civil Wars were very effective but extremely inaccurate especially at any distance over 300 yards.

Cannon balls didn't fit the gun barrels tightly and so couldn't fly with any great accuracy. Cannons had no sights and had to be physically moved back into position and re-aimed after every shot.

The cannon balls would fly higher or lower depending on how hot the barrel was which changed with firing. Targets were very quickly obscured by powder smoke from all the firing.

A bombardment of a town like Laugharne would have seen hundreds of cannon balls fired each day with immense and widespread damage to buildings in the town.

Cannons around 1500 feet per second. They could range from 3 pounds to 63 pounds. Cannon balls were solid iron spheres travelling at around 1500 feet per second.

The heaviest gun typically used on a battlefield was a 'Culverin' of 9-12 pounds. Culverin shot was recovered from the damaged face of the Castle gatehouse, evidence of the power of the bombardment to be seen today.

Amongst the artillery ringing Laugharne were at least 1 27 pdr 'Demi Cannon' and a 47 pdr 'Cannon' then the second largest type of artillery in Europe. These were designed to sink the most powerful warships or batter down the strongest castles. The effect on houses from any of these would have been terrible.

The only way a even a normal stone wall could resist any of these shots was if a huge amount of earth was hard packed up against it and then only for a while. Very few cannon balls survive from battles and sieges as soldiers were paid 6 pence a time to recover them.

- 1 A depiction of a Civil War storming party
- 2 An illustration of a soldier of both sides in the Civil War
- 3 A contemporary image of a Siege Battery as would have been seen circling Laugharne
- 4 A Culverin which was a typical artillery piece from the period. Ammunition from this type of gun was found at Laugharne

